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Chapter 3

What is Left since 1989?

William Outhwaite

1989 and the left

This chapter is concerned both with the Left in a narrow political sense and with broader aspects of the socio-political context which has developed in Europe and elsewhere in the past two decades. I shall focus particularly on Europe, since it is the region I know best, and in situating a reflection on postcommunist Europe in the context of Europe as a whole, my aim is to complement other contributions in this book, not least Barbara Falk's emphasis on the US, Fred Halliday's chapter on the post-socialist Third World and, most directly, Laure Delcour's chapter on the shift to a 'global Europe'. I have not addressed the situation in Russia, since this is well covered in Tucker's chapter.¹

Major turning points in European and, to some extent, world history of the recent past can be located in 1945, or 1968, or, more pessimistically, the mid-seventies as the prosperity of the West came under pronounced economic and environmental pressures. It was, however, the developments of '1989 and all that' which attracted the newly reinvented label of the 'End of History' (Fukuyama, 1989) and encouraged some of the 'post'-conceptualisations which had emerged earlier.² The revolutions of 1989 also provided a particular challenge to social scientific explanation. The tip of this iceberg was the element of surprise they provided for almost all observers (Outhwaite and Ray, 2005, ch. 1). More substantial was the question they raised about causal processes in society: whatever our general preferences for structural explanation or for *histoire événementielle*, we must, I think, be impressed by the conjunction of long-term tendencies such as the economic slow-down and the ideological and cultural

¹ This is a first attempt at addressing the questions on which I am working from 2008 to 2011 in a project generously supported by the Leverhulme Foundation with a major research fellowship. I gratefully acknowledge this support, and that of my new colleagues at Newcastle in encouraging me to apply for the fellowship when I was not yet even on the payroll. My thanks also to Paul Blokker, Vladimir Fours and the editors for comments on an earlier draft.

² First among those is of course the 'post-modern', anticipated in the US but now associated with Lyotard (1979); this had considerable appeal in parts of the postcommunist region, partly because it was new and partly perhaps because it resonated with a reality in which so much had become fluid.

erosion of the state socialist dictatorships on the one hand, and Gorbachev's initiatives and their intended or unintended consequences on the other. Something similar can be said for the postcommunist transition decades (the plural is intentional): apparently open futures rapidly solidifying into relatively conventional political and economic structures, but with repeated shocks as developmental trajectories were abruptly interrupted, accelerated or redirected (Kitschelt, 2003). The process of postcommunist transition shows, in particular, the dangers of bypassing society and assuming that it was enough to 'fix' the economic and political-legal systems. In the analysis of postcommunist transition, a particular conception of linear progress, and the imperatives allegedly resulting from this, is shown to dominate social and political discourse across the postcommunist world and to pre-empt and occlude political choices (Kennedy, 2002; Blokker, 2005; Wydra, 2007).

The 1989 revolutions were, of course, highly concentrated in time, confining themselves to the autumn and early winter of that year. As with 1968, however, it makes sense to speak of 'the 1989 years', with important pre-shocks in the preceding years, notably with Solidarity in Poland,³ but also to be found in ecological movements and initiatives in the Baltic states (Strayer, 1998: 153), Central Europe, Bulgaria and elsewhere. The aftershocks of 1989 are still continuing. As Okey (2004: vii) puts it, 'Just as the grand narrative of feudal absolutism's overthrow by bourgeois democracy in 1789 breaks up in the hands of modern historians, so in hindsight do ideas of a communist totalitarian model suddenly hitting the buffers in 1989.' Another historian, Padraic Kearney (2006: 114) makes the same point:

... "1989" is in many cases an inaccurate shorthand; the real end to authoritarian rule would take another decade. The fall of second-generation authoritarian governments in 1997-2000 was at times no less dramatic than the events of 1989. Four cases – Slovakia, Romania, Croatia and Serbia – each show, paradoxically, how much harder it was for a democratic opposition to succeed when the repression of the communist era gave way to a soft dictatorship that offered a program of xenophobic nationalism and crony capitalism.

³ As the historian Robin Okey (2004: 30) notes, 'In a communist experience divided into two phases by the suppression of the Prague Spring, the Solidarity crisis [of 1980] falls halfway through the second phase, sharing some traits with 1968 but in others anticipating 1989.' In 1989 itself, the 4th June, for which we remember the Tien-an-Men Square massacre in China, was also the day on which Solidarity won all the seats in the Polish senate and all but one of the seats available in the *Sejm* (Okey, 2004: 69-70). Harald Wydra's superb book, *Communism and the Emergence of Democracy* (2007), shows the importance of the earlier movements of dissidence and resistance for shaping the democratic transitions of 1989 and after.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the ‘colour revolutions’ which are still continuing⁴ can, I think be seen as ‘catching-up revolutions’ in Habermas’s sense – perhaps more appropriately than when he coined the term (Habermas, 1990).⁵ The Chinese transition to capitalism under the continuing dictatorship of the Party should also, I think, be seen in this context.

This contextualisation of 1989 suggests a further expansion beyond the communist world. 1989 was, of course, primarily marked by the end of state socialism in its Stalinist and post-Stalinist sense. It also, however, provided a major boost to what we were just beginning to call globalisation and to the neoliberal ideologies and regimes which were already well established. More controversially, it might be seen as making an important contribution to the end of three processes: the long social democratic century which began in the second half of the nineteenth century; the age of affluence running from the late 1940s in Western Europe and North America and the ‘European social model/welfare state’; Atlantic or ‘Northern’ hegemony in the world.⁶

From communism to postcommunism

First, however, we should look more closely at the effects of ‘1989’ in the postcommunist region itself. Ezra Vogel wrote at the end of the 1960s of ‘communist universals’ (one-party state, planned economy, etc.),⁷ and is worth asking what we might categorise as

⁴ The removal of Milošević lacked a specific colour but was manifestly in the same vein. The colour spectrum may – or may not – be drawn upon in candidate states for a further rectifying revolution such as Belarus and North Korea. David Edgar (2009) comments interestingly that ‘...in retrospect, rather than being the last of the 20th-century revolutions, 1989 looks more like an anticipation of the colour/flower-coded revolutions of the 21st...’

⁵ Catching up, in other words, with the post-World War Two capitalist democracies. As Fred Halliday points out in his chapter (n.2), Habermas’ phrase was implicitly inverting Khrushchev’s prediction that socialism would catch up with and overtake capitalism. Habermas, like François Furet, was struck by the absence of new ideas in 1989, though this is perhaps unfair to dissident thinkers who were indeed not *inventing* liberalism and democracy but were upholding them in difficult conditions (See Wydra, 2007; Blokker, 2008).

⁶ The term ‘trente glorieuses’ was used by the economist Jean Fourastié (1907-1990) to refer to the years of post-war affluence ending roughly with the oil price shock of 1973. For a useful recent discussion of the European social model in the context of politics after 1989 see Azmanova (2008); see also my discussion of the work of Frank Castles and others in Outhwaite (2008: ch. 3). On Atlantic hegemony, see in particular the work of Kees van der Pijl (1984; 1998).

⁷ See Chalmers Johnson (1970) and Tökes (1997: 109).

postcommunist universals. Among these are, at least for the more developed parts of the postcommunist world:

- 1) a relatively peaceful transfer of power, sometimes involving a ‘transition pact’ or ‘handshake’⁸ between the old elites and
- 2) a broad-spectrum political opposition movement, such as Solidarity in Poland, Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia or Sajudis in Lithuania,⁹ which tends to break up soon after the takeover of state power along either familiar, or less familiar, lines of political division
- 3) an economic (and therefore social) ‘transition shock’, amounting to anything from two to five or more years of negative growth (‘transition recession’) and enterprise closures, unemployment, high suicide rates etc.
- 4) discrediting, sometimes followed by relatively rapid rehabilitation, of previously ruling communist parties, this including purges and, as in other spheres,
- 5) ‘lustration’ – the exposure of members of earlier elites and others (including members of the anticommunist opposition movements) found to have collaborated with the security police
- 6) Finally, a pattern of politics characterised by a quite substantial degree of egalitarianism (or at least opposition to growing inequalities) but without forms of class-based politics still found in much of non-postcommunist Europe.

These processes modulated differently¹⁰ (or, in the Czechoslovak case, within different parts of the same state), but what is striking in hindsight is the degree of convergence. The bulk of formerly communist Europe is now in the European Union, with economies and political

⁸ See George Lawson (2005) on the modular dimensions of these ‘negotiated revolutions’.

⁹ Hungary, one of the countries where the opposition was strongest, is an exception to this pattern (Waller, 1994: 94). These catch-all movements ironically illustrate the old joke that if another party were allowed to oppose the communist single party everyone would join it and there would again be only one party ...

¹⁰ Paul Blokker and Vladimir Fours have reminded me that these fit the Central European and Baltic states much better than other parts of the region. Rather than abandon these categories in favour of a different set for South-East Europe and the former Soviet Union, however, I am inclined to see them as tending to manifest themselves much more gradually, unevenly and in some cases hardly at all. (Conversely, Tucker’s elite continuity model fits Russia, as he notes, better than the rest of the bloc. I would anticipate more ‘colour’-type revolutions leading gradually towards something like the outcomes in East Central Europe and the Baltic republics.

regimes at least sufficiently respectable to satisfy the accession criteria. As Jan Zielonka writes:

When we look at democratic institutions across the enlarged EU there is no clear East-West divide, at least from the formal point of view. All new members are either parliamentary or semi-presidential republics... They all have constitutions providing checks and balances between different branches of power. Citizens' basic rights and freedoms are guaranteed by law. True, laws on the media in the new member states are in constant flux, with government officials trying to manipulate television broadcasting in particular. However, in this sense the situation is not as bad as in some old EU member states such as Italy. (Zielonka, 2006: 79) ¹¹

The striking differences in initial conditions, such as the substantial private sector and opposition in Poland contrasting with virtually no private sector and an almost entirely underground opposition in Czechoslovakia, may have influenced the initial political shape of the transition, but they appear to have had little long-term effect. The same goes for the violent transition shock in Poland, contrasting with a more gradualist approach in the Czech and Slovak republics.

Whether countries chose the Big Bang, or gradualism; won the foreign-investment lottery (Hungary's per capita FDI was eight times that of Poland) or employed vouchers, or nomenklaturization, or some combination of these, did not greatly affect their success. More important has been the level of social and economic development *before* the fall of communism.¹²

The fates of ex-ruling communist parties were more variable. Depending on the local and geopolitical context, but also on their own capacity to adapt, they survived or faded away only gradually in some parts of the block; elsewhere they were quarantined but often bounced back surprisingly quickly as in Hungary, Lithuania or Latvia (though not in nearby Estonia). Overall, what is striking is the peaceful nature of the transition and the relative acceptance of residually or formerly communist politicians and parties, in a context of rather strong

¹¹ See also Merkel, 2008. Zielonka (2006: 38-43) concedes that things are less rosy in the other postcommunist countries.

¹² As Kenney (2006: 25) writes, 'Whether countries chose the Big Bang, or gradualism; won the foreign-investment lottery (Hungary's per capita FDI was eight times that of Poland) or employed vouchers, or nomenklaturization, or some combination of these, did not greatly affect their success. More important has been the level of social and economic development *before* the fall of communism.' It is of course difficult, as George Lawson (2005) has pointed out, to distinguish long-term factors of this kind from the short-run effects of the way in which the revolutions took place. My conjecture, for what it's worth, is that even if the revolutions had been much longer, messier and bloodier than they were, these conditions would in the end have substantially shaped the outcome. I think that the example of the Baltic States supports this line of analysis.

suspicion of *all* political or civic activity (Grzymała-Busse, 2003; Curry and Urban, 2003; Hough, 2006). In other words, what Ken Jowitt (1992) called ‘the Leninist extinction’ was not followed by the extinction of the Leninists (not that that is a particularly good description of the disillusioned careerists and technocrats who filled the ruling communist parties in the 1980s). The only possible explanation seems to be that people objected to the *methods* used by the communists and the poor performance of the regimes rather than what one might call the *acquis communiste* of modernisation, urbanisation, educational expansion and so forth. As Robin Okey (2004: 30) stresses, ‘the red thread running through the East European communist experience was not hostility to the regimes’ developmental goals, but distrust of communists and their means’. Postcommunist electorates might not fully trust the old parties, but they least trusted them at least as far as they could vote for them, in justified anticipation that they could, if necessary, vote them out again. If what Jowitt has called the ‘recovering communists’ agreed to change their spots, they were permitted to take part in political debate alongside other political groupings. As such, their fate became subject to the same contingencies as other left or centre-left parties in the rest of Europe, a point I return to later (see also Naimark (1999: 325).

On the other hand, one of the factors shaping postcommunist politics continues to be the past of the parties and their personnel. In Poland, for example, the division between former communists and oppositionists remains highly salient, and right-wing parties have repeatedly used scandals from the communist period to discredit their opponents. The varied approaches across the postcommunist region to the issue of lustration reflect, in part, the balance of political forces as well as more universalistic considerations of political morality. Initially, except in Germany, where the Stasi had been a target from the beginning of the transition, with raids of their headquarters in several cities during the winter of 1989-90, the tendency had been to draw what Tadeusz Mazowiecki called a ‘thick line’ under the past. In Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel spent part of his 1990 New Year address arguing that there was no point in ‘laying all the blame on those who ruled us before’ (Kenney, 2006: 82). The term lustration was introduced in Czechoslovakia much later, in 1991, at a time when the attempted coup in the USSR had aroused fears of a return of communism. Those shown to have collaborated with the secret police or to have had certain roles in the Party were banned from public service jobs for five years. In Poland, a similar law was not implemented until 1999, though without a ban on work except in those cases where it could be shown that suspects had lied about their past (David, 2006).

A related issue is the relative lack of celebrations or memorials of the transition. In Germany, the opening of the Berlin Wall and the Day of German Unity are celebrated and a monument to 'freedom and unity' is planned (Saunders, forthcoming). Elsewhere, however, what one finds is more often just the removal or replacement of monuments (of which of course there had been an over-abundance) and a certain amount of renaming of streets, as well as museums like the 'House of Terror' in Budapest or the Museum of Genocide in Vilnius. The tenth anniversary of 1989 passed without much notice, and the same may well be true of the twentieth (present company excepted). Harald Wydra (2007: 204ff) writes that, 'the very symbols of the revolutions of 1989 or 1991 have all but eroded.' This reflects more than just the absence, in for example Poland and Hungary, of crucial dates such as November 9 in the GDR or November 17 in Czechoslovakia (which *are* of course celebrated). It suggests a broader conclusion, that '... the share of dissidence in the destruction of communism was hardly recognised by domestic and international publics' (Wydra, 2007: 209).

The exceptionally fraught relation to the past, however, remains a distinctive feature of postcommunist political life,¹³ and one which often still overrides the left-right division. What other distinctive features can one identify? Postcommunist Europe remains the poorer half of the continent, though increasingly catching up as Western growth rates slow down. As Daniel Chirot (2002) has emphasised, these differences may not last:

If Serbia had not been led into a disastrous political adventure...it would have emerged from communism no more backward than Poland. The differences in degree of modernization between Romania or Bulgaria, and, say, Hungary or Poland, need not last more than one or two generations. Similarly, all of postcommunist Europe has the capacity to substantially catch up to Western European levels well before the end of this new century. After all, in 1960 Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Ireland were so backward that hardly anyone thought they might have reached near-Western levels of modernity by 2000.'

The oft noted volatility of postcommunist politics might be another distinctive feature, though Western politics seems also to be heading in this direction, as recent developments in Italy, France and now the UK illustrate. Some fragility or rootlessness is surely to be expected of relatively new political parties. Attila Ágh (1998) has commented on the over-

¹³ Almost all European states have a history as perpetrators, victims or, in the case of the neutral states, collaborators of fascism and Nazism. Postcommunist states combine this with reflection on their communist past, in unstable and shifting compounds.

parliamentarisation of postcommunist politics, and Michály Bihari (cited by Tőkes, 1997: 136) on the way in which the Hungarian party system has tended to float above real political life. But such processes can also be seen in Western ‘postdemocracy’ (Lawson, 2005:105). The other side of this coin is, of course, the role of civil society, which flourished dramatically in the late 1980s (especially in Poland and in a much more muted form elsewhere – for example in the churches in Germany) and fizzled out no less strikingly in the first postcommunist years (Outhwaite and Ray, 2005: chapter 7). Here as in other respects, the East replicates patterns in the West, where civil society politics developed in the ‘1968 years’, but over a shorter time period.¹⁴

Nationalism, which Adam Michnik aptly called the terminal illness of communism, attracted a good deal of attention in the postcommunist region in the early years, for reasons which were all too obvious in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Looking back after twenty years, however, one is struck by how much did *not* happen. The break-up of the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia all occurred in a quite casual way,¹⁵ with only the long-expected demise of Yugoslavia going disastrously wrong (Vujačić, 1996). We shall never know whether, as some people have suggested, a rapid offer of fast-track EU membership to Yugoslavia along with other postcommunist states would have averted the tragedy, but this must come high on the list of missed opportunities. In the post-Soviet case, there was a time when fragmentation along national/regional lines seemed to threaten the whole of Russia, with some even anticipating the secession of cities like Saint Petersburg.¹⁶ Whatever the long-term consequences of the break-up of the Union, which remains after all one of several possible sites for a third world war, Russia has held together with at least a semblance of democratic order. The break-up of Czechoslovakia may be a pity, but it was hardly driven by nationalism in any strong sense, and after the demise of Vladimir Mečiar’s regime in Slovakia, the damage seems relatively slight. The rapid passage of Slovakia from pariah in the nineties to EU member in 2004 illustrates the speed with which things can change in the region. For what it is worth, the surviving rogue state in postcommunist Europe, Belarus, is

¹⁴ On these effects of 1968, see Bhambra and Demir (2009), especially the chapters by Lynne Segal and Ken Plummer.

¹⁵ Russia’s relation to its empire, which Alexander Filippov (1992) brilliantly analyzed in the 1990s, remains to be worked through. Lara Ryazanova-Clarke has suggested in conversation that the term ‘empire’ is currently looming much larger in Russian public discourse.

¹⁶ When I asked a sociologist from St Petersburg about these rumours, he joked that even some *districts* of the city were showing interest in the possibility of breaking away from the rest.

anything but nationalist, having re-established, at least for the time being, a close union with Russia. Postcommunist nationalism, therefore, remains dangerous primarily because it occurs in dangerous regions, notably those on the Russian periphery. But it is otherwise no more prominent than separatist nationalism in much of Western Europe.

What of the place of the region overall on the political spectrum? One of the surprises of 1989 was the relative lack of interest in 'third ways' between capitalism and socialism, and a distinct preference for more macho forms over capitalism over softer 'Nordic' ones. The Czech prime minister – and later president – Václav Klaus notoriously rejected the social market economy in favour of a market economy 'without adjectives', and the popularity of flat taxes in Estonia and elsewhere is a telling illustration of this general inclination. Yet Klaus' neoliberal bark was not matched by his bite and the region retains quite strong egalitarian traditions, no doubt reinforced by the sense that most people who have got very rich under postcommunist conditions have probably done so in dubious ways. Survey evidence suggests a majority perception in east central Europe that there are 'strong' or 'very strong' conflicts between managers and workers and that income differentials are 'too great', and a relation between the perception of conflict and objective inequality as measured by Gini coefficient (Delhey, 2001: 203-5). In other words, post-communist electorates remain more egalitarian in their attitudes than Western Europeans, to a degree more closely related than in the West to the actual levels of inequality in their societies.

The traditional expression of egalitarian attitudes, in Europe and to some extent elsewhere, has been social democratic politics, but the scissor effect in the post-communist countries of the local demise of socialist/communist political and economic policies and the general reorientation of Western social democracy into third way or 'new' politics has perhaps hindered what would otherwise have been a natural development. The relative weakness of social democracy is the other side of the surprising resilience of many former ruling communist parties. It rapidly became clear that social democracy was not going to inherit the postcommunist political terrain. In the first free elections in Hungary, Poland and the GDR, social democrats outpolled former communists in only the GDR, and there only marginally (22% as against 16%); elsewhere they barely achieved between half and a quarter of the (itself modest) communist share of the vote, as Deschouwer and Coppetiers (1994: 8) noted. They concluded:

Social democracy may be considered to be marginalized in eastern Europe by the very logic of the transition process, whose ends and means fit more easily both into the liberal programme on market economy and into the nationalistic conception of a state-building process. Class solidarity and international solidarity are not perceived as appropriate means to carrying out the transition process towards a market economy. The defence of workers' rights in industries unable to survive under the new economic conditions is easily perceived as being 'conservative'. The east European social-democratic programme of reforms convinces voters less than does the liberal or the nationalist one. (Deschouwer and Coppetiers, 1994: 15-16)

The double paradox of the relative success of postcommunist parties and the relative lack of success of (other) social democratic parties in the region¹⁷ reflects a more fundamental paradox: the sense in public opinion both that transition is inevitable and that it is deeply problematic. According to the regular New Europe Barometer surveys, in several postcommunist countries, including Hungary, recorded approval of the communist regime was consistently higher than approval of the 'current' regime. On the question of the relative approval of the economic system, only the Czech Republic and Poland showed significantly higher support for the current system than the communist one; in Slovenia, opinion was evenly balanced. Seeing the glass as half-full rather than half empty, one can say that the more successful countries prefer postcommunism, and even the postcommunist economy, to the communist one and that the Hungarian exception is explained by that country's relatively better political and economic state before 1989 than its neighbours (Ekiert, 2003: 96-7). The 2001 and 2004 surveys show a shift towards support for the postcommunist status quo, though also an increase, except in the Czech Republic, in approval of the former communist political regimes. This is not the same as wanting to re-establish communism, which is very much a minority opinion (ranging in 2004 from 42% in Russia to a mere 7% in Estonia, the means for EU members and applicants (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia in 2004) being 15% and 23% respectively (Rose, 2006: 25). It does, however, show that 'Ostalgie' is by no means peculiar to eastern Germany.

The position of political forces in the postcommunist region continues, therefore, to be shaped by the transition process itself, the types of regime resulting from this and the way in which it is evaluated. Influences of this kind are not unique to postcommunist Europe: economic crisis and the collapse of communist parties may push you, depending where you live, towards Berlusconi, or the *Front National*, or Scottish nationalism. Nevertheless, this

¹⁷ The Czech Republic, where it was historically strong, is something of an exception.

global impact of transition suggests that postcommunism remains more than an historical expression (Stenning and Hörschelman, 2008).¹⁸

I have concentrated to date on the national state level, but a major part of any account of the postcommunist decades must also explore the transnational impact of the EU. This theme has perhaps tended to fall between the two stools of a focus on the EU's enlargement on the one hand, and on the politics of individual states on the other; the excellent study by Vachudová (2005) is a welcome exception. In Vachudová's analysis, the EU's shift after the Copenhagen summit from 'passive leverage', which merely reinforced liberal tendencies in countries already on that path, to 'active leverage' which changed the balance of political forces in more marginal countries such as Slovakia and enabled political elites to groom them for eventual accession, was a crucial contribution. The EU, like the West as a whole, was slow to respond to the needs of post-1989 Europe, but its long-term impact has been massively beneficial overall. Unlike the situation in Western Europe, no postcommunist state has rejected the option of membership and none seems likely to. Having reinforced differences between postcommunist states in what has been aptly called the 'regatta' towards accession, the challenge for the Union is to develop common policies to reduce the dangerous inequalities which persist between member states. EU accession has often been taken as a marker for the end of postcommunist transition, and with border-free travel, currencies pegged to, or already replaced by, the Euro, it is easy to slip into this way of thinking. But we need also to bear in mind the persistence of the past, both in the theme of postcommunism as a 'return' to capitalism, national independence and so on (Lagerspetz, 1999) and in the viscosity of social structures which was so often overlooked in the early 1990s.

What is left?

Having looked at the postcommunist region, in an admittedly selective way, I turn now to other aspects of the impact of 1989, in particular the three themes identified at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁸ Despite its age, the four-volume series edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (1997) remains a valuable source on postcommunist politics, both for its comprehensive coverage and because the contributors were asked to address a common range of questions listed in the appendix to each volume. Among more recent works I would highlight the edited collection by White, Batt and Lewis (2003) and the monographs by Vachudová (2005), Zielonka (2006), and Wydra (2007).

First, Western social democrats, like those further to the non-communist left, could reasonably expect to pursue 'business as usual'. Whatever they understood by socialism as a long-term goal, it was not (except in the caricatures of their enemies) what has gone down the drain in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, even if one did not make, as the communists did, the 'opportunism' of social democracy a definitional property, it was clear that most western parties were slowly but surely following the path taken in 1958 by the German SPD, even if in Britain, for example, it took Blair, in 1997, to baptise the mutation with the label 'New Labour'. In Germany, of course, the SPD had long been overtaken on the left by The Greens and Alternatives (except electorally), though the subsequent performance of the Greens since their participation in the SPD-led government has become more unpredictable.

How much difference did 1989 make to this general trajectory? Probably not a lot. If, somewhat improbably but perhaps not impossibly, the Soviet Union was still ruling much of Europe today, no doubt in Chinese style, Western social democracy might well look much as it does now. At best, the demise of state socialism made it possible for reformers like Blair and Giddens to present the third way as a clearly desirable alternative to neostalinism and neoconservatism – the former dead in the water and the latter showing signs of desperation. The demise of western social democracy has been so often predicted since the 1950s that it would be unwise to assume it now, however unpromising the current situation in almost all of Europe except the Iberian Peninsula. Electoral support for social democratic parties, as Anderson and Camiller (1995) show, was much the same in 1974-90 as in the 'glorious years' of 1945-73. On the other hand, traditional 'labour movement' links between trade unions and socialist political parties, where they existed at all, have greatly weakened, as have unions themselves. Social democratic parties and their close competitors like the German Greens and now also the Left Party have long been divided between traditional themes of material security and more 'post-materialist' ones. Albena Azmanova (2008) has taken this further in suggesting that the contrast between material and cultural issues also links to conceptions of risk and opportunity, with some social democrats, for example, embracing the Europeanization of politics and others reacting defensively against it. Increasing electoral volatility means that apparently substantial parties can be virtually wiped out, like the French socialists in 1993 and the Italian left in 2008. As the profile of traditional social democratic parties becomes less and less socialist, supporters may migrate to 'The Left' in Germany or the SNP in Scotland, both closer to traditional social democratic values

than the SPD or Labour, that is if they do not switch, as many have done in France, Italy and Austria, to the extreme Right.

In postcommunist Europe, residually left parties have survived the initial image problems created by the 'soc'- prefix in the aftermath of 1989. It was the guiltless Italian communist party which dissolved itself (Magri, 2008), not the deeply compromised Hungarian one, which felt the need merely to drop the word 'Workers' from Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Of the nineteen parties currently affiliated to the 'European Left', eight include the word communist in their names, including the Hungarian Communist Workers' Party and the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova. There has been a shift from labels such as 'communist', 'socialist' or 'workers' to the snappier 'left', as in Germany, where the antecedents of *Die Linke* were the *Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus*, the successor to the East German SED, and the West German *Wahlalternative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit* – a mouthful even by German standards. The name change and merger, bringing together the former East German minister Gregor Gysi and the West German leftist Oskar Lafontaine, seems to have finally got the PDS out of its ghetto; meanwhile its namesake, the Italian Left Democratic Party (PDS again) dropped the 'Party' (the most neutral word in its name) to become Left Democrats, *de facto* rather centrist, like the *Radicaux de Gauche* in France. The Estonian Social Democratic Labour Party changed its name in 2004 to the Estonian Left Party (EVP).

Social democracy may persist, then, in both East and West, in the double form of left-centre or 'third way' formations, with a more radical variant attached or adjacent to them.¹⁹ On the other hand, these formations seem increasingly hollow and hence vulnerable in a context of 'postdemocracy' (Crouch, 2004) which favours more volatile and populist forms of politics. It may well be, as Darrow Schecter (2007) has argued, that the real action on the modern left is in social movements, regional, national and global, rather than in party politics. We have, of course, been saying this sort of thing since 1968, but, like weather forecasts, forecasts do occasionally come true, if not always at quite the time predicted. From this perspective, 1989 appears as an intermediate marker between 1968, the official birth year if there is one of new social movements, and the present, rather as 1968 appears as a way-station in the democratisation of communist Europe.

¹⁹ Something like Eurocommunism, for example, lived comfortably enough as a minority strand inside the Labour Party in Britain.

Second, it is tempting to see the ‘thirty glorious years’ of postwar affluence as also the golden years of social democracy, though one has to remember that, in France and Italy, socialist and communist parties had not yet entered government in the mid-1970s. The broader point remains true, however, that the fate of left parties is intimately linked to that of welfare states. The demise of the welfare state, like that of social democracy, has been greatly exaggerated, but the figures of constant or even rising expenditure mask a real decline in the quality of provision as expectations rise and the age structures of almost all European populations become more problematic. Even more importantly, the terms of the debate have been transformed. What was previously a matter for national politics is now increasingly shaped by the EU, which may choose to sustain or improve welfare and labour regimes or, in the name of mobility of labour and free competition, to erode standards achieved after long struggles in the wealthier member states. The EC/EU has traditionally steered clear of this messy area, but it is not clear that it can continue to do so, as what is inelegantly called ‘social dumping’ undermines what is left of the European social model. This is less a problem of individual member states, which can be kept roughly in line by minimum legal thresholds of social provision, safety regulations etc., as of the Europeanization of commercial contracts. Domestic employers, partially tamed over decades of trade union struggles, are increasingly being supplanted by transnational gangmasters. Capitalism has arguably become more dangerous, both to itself and to democracy (Habermas, 2009; Outhwaite, 2009).²⁰

My third conclusion is somewhat more contentious. The US and its allies won the cold war in the late 1980s, in the sense that their principal opponent declared peace and its former allies switched sides soon after 1989. Ten of NATO’s current 26 members are postcommunist countries, though not all these states existed or were in the Warsaw Pact in 1989; the Soviet *animatrice* of the Pact has of course itself ceased to exist. The new world order announced by President Bush I was clearly meant to be led by the US, and Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* was an ironical reflection of US hegemony. On the other hand, the long predicted economic collapse of the US now seems to be taking place, albeit in fits and starts, while its moral

²⁰ There is an important issue here whether one sees the Anglo-American style of capitalism as discredited by 2008 or still empowered by the longer-term developments since 1989, as Saskia Sassen argues in her chapter, and now simply in a phase of temporary retrenchment (though perhaps riding for another fall).

reputation, such as it was, has been trashed by Bush II.²¹ The EU, having failed to prevent the second Iraq war and gone along with the occupation, also has a somewhat tarnished image and lacks the will to polish it up. Russia too, as the successor to the USSR, is subject to something of a double standard (Sakwa, 2008) but does everything possible to live up to its bad reputation, most recently in Georgia, while China, which had benefited from a double standard in the other direction, is now also being seen in more realistic terms.

What is not in doubt, I think, is the long-term trend towards the marginalisation of Europe and North America in the economic and political life of the world.²² In this context, the double unification of Europe, in the sense of both the overcoming of division and the gradual progress towards political union, becomes more and more a matter of local rather than 'lobal interest. This does not however make it any less important *within* Europe, and books like this which address the fundamental importance of 1989 are important in that they tackle *both* of these impacts.

1989 and its others

Last year we celebrated another anniversary, that of 1968, and it makes sense to look at that year and 1989 together. An excellent edited volume by Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (2004) on *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* puts 1968 into an appropriate context. 1968 differs from the other two years in that they both brought a specific outcome: the end of dictatorship and, for much of Europe, occupation, war and genocide. We may be nostalgic for the demonstrations or for the breaching of the Berlin Wall in the wonderful autumn of 1989 and, if we are old enough, for the celebrations of victory or liberation in 1945,²³ but these are in a sense ancillary to the main events: in 1968, the main action was the *événements*.

²¹ What novelist could have dreamed up a fantasy in which the US, occupying a military base in a corner of Cuba while having threatened nuclear war in 1962 if Cuba installed some Soviet missiles on its own territory, would go on, four decades later, to establish a concentration camp there for kidnapped foreigners? Obama may be able to partially restore the image of the US, but it remains the case that under the Bush administration it managed to destabilize world politics (via the invasion of Iraq) and the world economy (by pioneering dangerous financial operations which were imitated elsewhere with disastrous results).

²² This long-standing theme has recently been addressed in a number of studies, for example Parag Khanna's *Second World* (2008).

²³ There is a significant western bias in much of the reflection on 1945 and 1989: the triumphalist idea that 'we' got rid of fascism in 1945 and held back communism until it collapsed in 1989. This has to be balanced by a more self-critical account of the West's

1989 is, of course, also linked in more direct ways to 1968. In Czechoslovakia and across the Soviet bloc as a whole, it marked a clear end to the period initiated by the 'Eastern' 1968 of reform in the spring followed by repression in August and 'normalisation' thereafter. The failure of 1968 in that part of the world, along with the failures of opposition in 1953 in East Germany and 1956 in Hungary, at least achieved a further unmasking of state socialism as a viable alternative to capitalism. For leftists in the west, 1989 was the demise of a real, if unattractive, alternative to capitalism. This could be seen either positively, as the removal of a distraction to the pursuit of socialism in the west, or, more pessimistically, as a sign of its unviability. The rather western-centred response of Jürgen Habermas in his notion of a 'catching-up' or 'rectifying' revolution has to be seen in this context. To the extent that 1968 was a *communist* movement, the events of 1989 might be seen as its end, or at least its indefinite deferral (Elliot, 2007). On the other hand, if 1989 was the end of *scientific* socialism – meaning that socialism now had to be presented, if at all, as an attractive aspiration (in Engels' dismissive contrast, a utopia), what Alain Touraine perceptively characterised as the 'utopian communism' of 1968 is in some ways closer to the equally democratic and anti-authoritarian spirit of 1989.

But is 'celebration' the right way to capture either 1989 or 1968? We must again ask *why* there is so little official celebration, at least up to the present, of the 1989 anniversaries in the various countries of the bloc. The Baltic States and Germany are an exception, but they have national independence (and in the German case also reunification) to celebrate, and everyone does that. What is odd is that surely there should be *general* celebrations to mark the events of 1989. The Stalinist paradigm was played out and the Mexican or, as it was known in Poland, South Korean alternative, combining authoritarian politics with economic liberalisation and now of course represented by China, did not present themselves. The casualties, except in Yugoslavia and part of the periphery of the Soviet Union, were social, consisting in suicide and other forms of premature death rather than the result of military violence. Although the new world order did not come about, nor did the scenario of nationalist and subnational fragmentation widely anticipated for Russia and elsewhere. However, as Larry Ray and I have argued (Outhwaite and Ray 2004), 1989 was in at least

sustained preference for short-term stability over support for eastern democratic movements, culminating in a miserably desultory response to the opportunities to contribute to the reconstruction of much of Europe after 1989.

one way a bad time for the revolutions: the neoliberal heyday meant that economic policies were quite unnecessarily destructive and the prospect of a second Marshall Plan for postcommunist Europe rapidly faded. There was, however, quite a lot of talk of such a thing; Janine Wedel (1998: 29-30) writes that, although the US had ruled out a Marshall-type action by May 1990, it was only in 1993 that Witold Trzeciakowski, who had been aid coordinator in Poland in 1989-90, realised that it was not going to happen. Whereas Marshall Aid after WWII had been 90% in grant form, this was the case for only 10% of aid to postcommunist Europe up to 1992. In brief, therefore, the economic decline was unnecessarily harsh, and contributed to the limitations of already weakened socialist organisations such as trade unions and women's movements, and of the oppositional and critical civil society which had attracted such optimistic hopes.

When did 1989 end? Has it done so even today? Okey (2004:174) suggests that 'The East European transition from communism will not be over until the region is successfully integrated with the European Union.' Note that he says integrated *with*, not *into*. Many of the most interesting and important issues for the future concern the relation between these two prepositions, in particular as they are played out in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia itself. The accession of Ukraine looked a more realistic prospect before the brief, but nasty, war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. On the other hand, as Georg Vobruba (2005) has emphasized, the European 'dynamic' is essentially one of expansion and inclusion. Wherever the EU border lies, the state on the inside has an interest in encouraging the accession of its outside neighbour, to avoid economic competition, border difficulties and so forth (Vobruba, 2005: 27). This explains, for instance, current Polish policy with regard to Ukrainian accession, or that of Greece in relation to Turkey, despite the continuing tension over Cyprus. At some point, however, the EU's stated aim of stabilising its periphery has to be 'decoupled' from the prospect of full membership (Vobruba, 2005: 75). In many ways it would make sense to draw the line at the border of Russia, which is geographically huge, has an Asian as well as European presence and the sort of delusions of grandeur which France and the UK have more or less got over. Whether Russia can be persuaded to go along with this is, of course, another matter.

As with 1968, it is more appropriate to think of '*les années 89* ', not just because the transition in the Soviet Union, which initiated the unravelling of the bloc which Stalin had built, took a couple of years longer, but because the processes are still continuing there and

elsewhere. As an acute Ukrainian commentator, Mykola Riabchuk (2008) has pointed out, citing James Sherr, there is a striking parallel with the 1848 revolutions, which removed some regimes but left other liberalising transformations only half-finished.²⁴ At some point, no doubt, we shall stop referring to postcommunist or postsocialist Europe, just as we no longer refer in contemporary terms to post-Nazi Germany or post-Francoist Spain, but it will take some time (See Stenning and Hörschelman, 2008). Then, at last, 1989 will take its appropriate place in the sequence of Europe's revolutionary dates.

²⁴ Sherr was referring specifically to Ukraine's Orange Revolution, but the point has a more general application.

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